

Approved For Release 1999/09/07 : CIA-RDP75-00001R000200120036-4
The Powers Story

FOIAb3b

CPYRGHT

Pilot Tells of His Flight in the U-2, And the Government Seems Satisfied

"I was flying maybe one minute straight after the turn when I heard and felt a hollow-sounding explosion. It seemed to be behind me and I could see an orange-colored light."

The speaker: Francis Gary Powers. The time: Aug. 17, 1960. The place: the Hall of the Columns of Trade Union House in Moscow.

In almost the same words, Mr. Powers last week described his experience nearly two years ago when his U-2 photo-reconnaissance plane was downed over Russian soil. But although the story was similar, the setting this time was far different.

When Mr. Powers appeared in the Hall of Columns on his thirty-first birthday and confessed that he had, indeed, piloted a plane engaged in espionage activities over Russia, he raised both military and moral questions in the U.S. In his best shoe-pounding style, Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev expressed shock at the U.S.'s air trespass; cancelled President Eisenhower's trip to Russia; torpedoed a Paris summit meeting; and threatened countries with U.S. spy plane bases with retaliation.

But this was Khrushchev bluff and bluster. What really concerned Americans were such issues as:

Should Mr. Powers have blown up the plane to keep it from falling into the hands of the Russians?

Should he have killed himself to avoid capture and subsequent disclosure of espionage flights?

Should he have remained silent at the trial instead of explaining in detail about the flight, expressing sorrow over his part in the affair and asking for mercy?

The Debate Was On

These questions bothered Americans in 1960. A New York City luncheonette counterman said Mr. Powers was "a traitor to his country. He was paid to keep his mouth shut and he talked." The national commander of the American Legion said, "Powers served his country badly. . . . We are left with the impression that there was more of the mercenary in him than the patriot."

In the pilot's home town of Pound, Va., opinion was divided. A Pound theater manager said, "He had to tell the truth . . . there was nothing else the man could do." A less sympathetic college student said, "His testimony doesn't sound as American as I think it should be." Many Americans felt that the high pay Mr. Powers received—\$2,500 a month—carried with it an obligation to remain silent if captured, even, some said, to take his own life.

But by last week, the official climate, at least, had changed. Mr. Powers

told the Senate Armed Services Committee, "One thing I always remembered while I was there—that was that I was an American," the packed Senate caucus room burst into applause. His employer, the super-secret Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), said: "Mr. Powers lived up to the terms of his employment . . . and his obligations as an American."

At the hearing, Mr. Powers once again described the "U-2 incident"—his takeoff on May 1, 1960, his trouble with the automatic pilot inside the Russian border, the explosion he "heard and felt" as he neared the city of Sverdlovsk.

"For a short time there, I don't know how long, time had no meaning," he told the Senators.

Then, with a model of the U-2, he demonstrated how the plane began to spiral downward, passing him about in the small cockpit. He described how he opened the plane's canopy and, loosened his seat belt, tore himself loose from his oxygen hose, and bailed out at about 34,000 feet.

As he parachuted down, the pilot continued, he removed a tiny, poison-filled pin from a coin where it had been secreted and dropped it in his pocket, hoping it would be overlooked when he was searched. He had been given the pin to use "if you want to," but the CIA hadn't ordered him to kill himself.

When he landed, he saw another parachute in the air some distance away. At the time, he thought it might have been a stage of a rocket that could have struck his plane.

After his capture, he was searched and the poison pin was found. For the first several days, he was questioned for 10 to 12 hours daily. Then interrogation periods became shorter as the trial date neared. Finally, he was given whole week ends away from questions.

What Hit Him?

The Senators asked him:

Could a Russian anti-aircraft missile have clipped the U-2? He didn't know.

Had he been given any instructions on the course of conduct he was to follow in case of capture? The pilot read from a paper a set of instructions. It contained three points:

"1. If evasion is not feasible and capture appears imminent, pilots should surrender without resistance and adopt a cooperative attitude toward their captors.

"2. At all times while in the custody of their captors, pilots will conduct themselves with dignity and maintain a respectful attitude toward their superiors.

"3. Pilots will be instructed that they are perfectly free to tell the full truth about their mission with the exception of

will be advised to represent themselves as civilians, to admit previous Air Force affiliation, to admit current CIA employment, and to make no attempt to deny the nature of their mission."

Quizzed on the Trial

The Senators also asked about Mr. Powers' deportment at his trial: "You were quoted in the press as having stated at your trial that you had made a terrible mistake in flying over Russia and apologized to the Russian people and would never do it again. Was that a misquotation or did you make that statement at your trial?"

Mr. Powers replied: "No, that wasn't a misquotation. It was easy to say I was sorry because what I meant by saying that and what I wanted them to think I meant was quite different. My main sorrow was that the mission failed, and I was sorry that I was there, and it was causing a lot of adverse publicity to the States. But, of course, some of these things I couldn't say in that statement."

Mr. Powers' testimony left some military questions still unanswered. For example: What type of weapon caused the explosion? What part did the second parachute play? How did the Russians track the U-2?

And Mr. Powers' appearance before the committee did not answer the question of why the CIA didn't mention its instructions at the time of Mr. Powers' trial. The clean bill of health given him by CIA investigators meant that Mr. Powers, still a CIA employee, could collect some \$50,000 in back pay for the time he spent in the

Approved For Release 1999/09/07 : CIA-RDP75-00001R000200120036-4

PHOTO OVER

CPYRGHT



Black Star

ACCEPTED: Francis Gary Powers reported to his boss, the CIA, then faced the Senate Armed Services Committee. His long awaited answers were accepted. He had done his duty, the CIA concluded.